

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: George Guerrero, 70, retired plantation store employee, Puunene, and grocery store owner, Wailuku.

*"At that time, I was working in the [Camp 5] Plantation Store. I know the prices of the wholesale, and I know the percentage of retail. So, I was thinking, if I go make my store and I can sell so much, I know I can make it, because I had been working hard in the plantation store. If I work hard the same way....then I know I can make it. That's why, it makes my mind that I try my luck to make my own business."*

George Guerrero, Ilocano, was born November 17, 1909, in Bacarra, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. Because his parents were poor farmers and he had heard good things about Hawaii, he decided to leave the Philippines for Hawaii in 1926. His first stop was Kealia, Kauai where his main job was hō hana. Soon after, in 1927, he moved to Puunene Plantation and has lived on Maui ever since.

In 1928, Guerrero started working for Nagatani Store in Wailuku as a live-in clerk. After the store closed down in 1933, he returned to work in the sugar fields. He held various jobs on the plantation such as tractor driver and school bus driver until 1944, when he began working at the Camp 5 Store.

Guerrero put his Camp 5 Store experience to good use because, in 1946, he opened the Guerrero Store in Wailuku. He closed the store and retired in 1970.

Today, Guerrero and his wife, Mary, live in Kahului. He is involved with the Maui Filipino Community Association, Filipino Catholic Club, and is on the Board of Directors of the Maui Merchants' Association.

Tape No. 7-5-1-79 and 7-6-1-79

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

George Guerrero (GG)

October 6, 1979

Kahului, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. George Guerrero. Today is October 6, 1979. And we're at his home in Kahului, Maui.

Okay, Mr. Guerrero. Can we start by having you tell us where you were born and when you were born?

GG: I was born in the Philippines. Bacarra, Ilocos Norte in the Philippines. November 17, 1909.

WN: Okay. Can you tell me something about your parents? What kind of jobs they had?

GG: Well, my parents were farmers.

WN: What type of things did they grow?

GG: Well, they grow, like rice, tobacco, mungo beans and some other crops.

WN: Did they sell what they grew?

GG: Yes, they were selling what they grow because that's how we get our living.

WN: And when you were a child, did you help out in the fields?

GG: I do lots of helping in the field. Work in the field, work in the farm, or sometimes, go fishing. (Chuckles) So, that was a really wonderful time.

WN: Did you have any set chores that you had to do?

GG: Yes, I had lots.

WN: Do you remember some of them?

GG: Well, just like doing some other kind of jobs. Do all this. I try

to help my parents. Just go earn money. Go help plant the rice in the field to these neighbors. And then, some other jobs--plant mungo beans, like that. Just to help the parents to get our living.

WN: Did your brothers and sisters help out there, too?

GG: All of us help. Because we were poor, and we had to help our parents.

WN: Did your mother also work out there in the fields?

GG: Well, not often. Because she do some housekeeping job, and she prepare our food, bring 'em to the farm. So not every time. Very seldom she come out and help in the farm.

WN: You came over to Kealia, Kauai in 1926 when you were seventeen years old?

GG: Yes. I was assigned to Kealia, Kauai in 1926. And then, I transferred here in 1927 to HC&S [Hawaiian Commerical & Sugar Company] Puunene plantation.

WN: Okay. But first of all, can you tell me why you came over from Philippines to Kauai?

GG: Just because we were very poor, and then we like to go to help my parents to earn a living. That's why we came to Hawaii. Because [since] all of us going to school, high school, and he [GG's father] could hardly support us going to school.

WN: So, you came with your brothers and sisters?

GG: I came with my brother first, and then, the next one. Then following, after two years, my other brother came inside, follow us. Then after another one year, my sister came.

WN: And your parents stayed behind?

GG: They stayed back in the Philippines.

WN: Whose decision was it to come to Hawaii?

GG: Myself, I made the decision, because many of my classmates came to Hawaii and they were sending letters to their parents--sending money--that Hawaii is a good place to live.

That's why I told my parents, "I think I like to go to Hawaii, too."

So, he told me, "Well, if you like go, you can go." See?

And then my brother heard that. He said, "All right. I like go,

too. I like quit school."

So, at that time, we came up same time in the year of 1926.

WN: The friends you said that wrote to you about Hawaii, do you remember the kinds of things that they said about Hawaii?

GG: Oh, yeah. When they sent a letter, they told us that Hawaii is good, but you have to wake up in the morning at 4:30, leave the house at 5 o'clock--oh, yeah, 5:00 or 5:30--and come home from work in the field by 5 o'clock [p.m.]. So, that was a terrific lifelong hours to work. But I did not mind because our place is poor, and no other place to earn money unless you go to the neighbor. If he need help, then they hire, but not every day.

WN: Did your friends say anything about how hard the work was, and the money?

GG: Oh, yeah. They tell us, "You have to get the hoe and cut grass the whole day. If you change jobs, you go cutting cane, then the same thing. It's going to be the whole day." So, I prepared. Since I was here, I prepared to go cut grass.

WN: How did you prepare to go cut grass?

GG: Well, I applied for the job. See, because they told us to select which job you want to take. So, in the present time, I prepared go cut grass.

WN: Why did you choose to cut grass?

GG: I think that was easier for me than go cut cane--or they call it cane loader or hāpai kō before.

WN: So, when you first came to Hawaii, you knew you were going to cut grass already?

GG: I know because I was told by my friends who was already sending letter to us.

WN: What did your friends say about the money that they got?

GG: The money that they had, they only spend so much in food and the rest they keep it and send back to the Philippines to their parents. Because at that time, really you can save little bit, although it is a dollar a day [wages]. But you figure, before, everything that you buy was very cheap. Like codfish, before, you buy maybe twenty cents. Now, you buy 'em, maybe five dollars at the present time. So, it was really cheap at the time.

WN: Did you talk to any of your friends' parents when you were still in the Philippines about how did they feel about getting the money?



GG: Well, they told us, "Eh, if you go to Hawaii, you remember that you are still young. You guys, you think you can stay in the sun whole day? It's a hard job. If I were you, you better go school first. Finish the school."

But I (made up) my mind. So, I tell, "I think I go try Hawaii. Because my education, I can still go back to school in Hawaii if I have the money." Well, at that time, I did not. But from time to time, I (tried). You know, I go back to school--night class.

WN: When you were coming to Hawaii, did you think of going back to Philippines?

GG: That was my plan. Because when we was hired by the HC&S Company to come to Hawaii, we have a three year's contract. And the three year's contract, if you stay all in one plantation in the three year's contract, you have free passage to go back to the Philippines. That is why I was thinking, "We have to go back to the Philippines after three years."

WN: So after the three years, you didn't go back.

GG: After the three years, I didn't go back. Because it's almost, you know, we [got] used to living on this place, and now, we got used to mingle with all different nationalities. And then, we forget about Philippines already. At that time.

WN: You said you came here to work for HC&S. Actually, you came here first to work on Makee Plantation. Is that right?

GG: Yes.

WN: So, you did hō hana there?

GG: Yeah, that was the first one. That, they call the cut grass--the hō hana. That's cut grass.

WN: When you first came to Kauai, what were your impressions of Kauai?

GG: I thought I could not stay long. I thought I had to go back Philippines with all the hardship we was doing. We wake up at 4 o'clock [a.m.] and then go to the station at 5:30. It was terrible. I thought I could not stand so long.

WN: Okay, but then, you stayed. So, did you get used to the work?

GG: I get used to the work.

WN: Did you do any other kind of work besides cutting grass?

GG: Well, at that time, I did not. Only cutting grass.

WN: What kind of housing did you live in over in Kauai?

GG: Oh, well, they have that kind old houses with no stove. They have to give you firewood for cook outside the house. Even restroom, you have to go so many feet away from the house. There was no electricity. They have to give us a lamp.

WN: Did you live in the dormitory style?

GG: Yes. In the long house. They call it the long house.

WN: How many men lived in one long house?

GG: One long house, every room get two to three persons, it depends. If you are three guys friend, you can live three guys. In that house, there were twenty-five units.

WN: Did you come with any friends?

GG: From the Philippines? Yes, I came. From my place, we were about ten. Ten guys came that same place in the Philippines.

WN: Then the following year, you moved over to Puunene--HC&S Company?

GG: Yes.

WN: Now, why did you move?

GG: I had brother-in-law who was living in HC&S Puunene. So, he told me to go over there to Puunene because it's better, and maybe, he can help me to find a better job.

WN: Did your friends move to Puunene also?

GG: No, I did not see them anymore [after arriving]. I did not see them anymore. I don't know where they went. Maybe their relatives wen take them to the relative's place. Even my brother, I did not see him already at that time. He was assigned to Hilo in Union Mill, Kohala.

WN: Did he have to go to work there, or . . .

GG: Oh, yeah. He has to go because from Honolulu, the time we arrived from the boat, we were already assigned. So many guys going to Kauai, so many guys going to Hilo, so many guys going to Maui. All divided already.

WN: So, they separated you and your brother?

GG: Yeah, we were separated.

WN: You said that your brother-in-law told you it would be better to work Puunene. Did you have a choice? Could you just leave?

GG: The only thing, I was so lucky. When I went to HC&S and live with him, I did not cook in the morning. My brother-in-law prepared all the food in the morning, and when he get through cooking, he look the watch. Time to wake up. He tell me, "Well, you go eat now."

So I go. I eat, and then I change my clothes. After change my clothes, then we go to the train station. That was my benefit when I stay with him because when I was in Kauai, I cooked, myself. I have to wake up early in the morning. And no more even watch. We never get watch.

WN: So, did you go late to work sometimes?

GG: No, we go too early. Because we listen for the chicken [rooster] that crow in the morning. I thought, "Eh, that must be the time." I think maybe around three o'clock [a.m.] already, so we prepared. Find out that maybe it's only one o'clock.

(Laughter)

GG: That was really wonderful.

WN: When you were living with your brother at HC&S Puunene, was it just you and your brother in a house?

GG: No, we were four. Four of us was living there because he had three house mate. Then, I went to that house; we were four already.

WN: When your brother said it was better at Puunene, did he say the pay was better? Or the working conditions were better? Or what?

GG: I think about the same. The pay is the same--dollar a day--and the working condition is the same because it's the same thing. Cut grass. Either cut grass, I go cut cane, or hāpai kō. But I prefer go cut grass because I was yet too young.

WN: You were about eighteen years old?

GG: Yeah, about eighteen years old.

WN: Did you ever do the other types of jobs while you were working in the fields?

GG: I do. Sometime I work, anybody's work in the fields. The loading machine. They call the loading machine. The one that carry the cane on top the cane car. I used to go there part-time. Sometimes, somebody stay home; they get sick. They call me, and I go work in the machine. That's really hard job because you have to hold the cable from the machine, and run and go and hook 'em to the pile. Then the machine going pull on the pile and then throw 'em inside the car.

WN: So, they weren't doing hāpai kō, then, at that time?

GG: No, that is hāpai kō job. The hāpai kō has to pile up the pile, and then put cable. From the machine, now we go hook the cable to the pile. And the machine load that in the car.

WN: As you look at your cane experience, how did you feel about the work?

GG: I was thinking, myself, "I think that job is too hard for me." So, if I could find some other job, I would prepare to go different job.

WN: Then in 1928, you moved to a store?

GG: Yeah. When I was so tired, my brother-in-law told me, "Eh, you can work store, eh? You know about mathematics." He tell me.

"Oh yeah, I know." Because high school already. I got to know.

So, he told me, "Hey, mo' betta go find job."

And I had a friend who was working in a store, too. Tell me, "Hey, you want a store job? I can recommend you to this store because he's looking for one guy go [be a] salesman." At that time, I went, and then, he accept me.

WN: When did you first think about working in a store?

GG: I was encouraged by my friend who was working in the store. That changed my mind that I go and work in the store. Then he was explaining to me that [when you work in a store], you stay in the shade. The only thing you do is carry 100-pound rice, 100 pound of feed, you know? So, he tell me, "I don't mind because I can do that." Stay in the shade.

And he told me, "Rain or shine, you can work because you stay inside the store." That's why that encouraged me to go work.

WN: Was that all? Was there anything else, like better pay?

GG: Well, the pay at that time was not so good, but it was little bit better than in the plantation. I had one dollar a day in the plantation, but in there, I had \$1.35. In the store.

WN: What was the name of the store that you worked in?

GG: That was Nagatani Store in Waikapu, Wailuku.

WN: Did you continue to live in the Puunene Camp while you worked in the store?

GG: No, they [Nagatanis] had a house for me. They gave me the house where I was staying. That was a plantation house, but I don't know

what arrangements they made because I think that was free for them.

WN: Did you live above the store?

GG: Just right next to the store.

WN: Was everything paid for?

GG: You mean my pay?

WN: No, your room and board, and things like that.

GG: At that time, I did not pay anything on my board. See, because I just stay in that house and go eat in the store. They give me free food, and then they give me \$1.35 one day. I had free.

WN: You said that you were good in math, or you knew some math because you went up to ninth grade in school. If you didn't know any math, do you think you would have gotten the job?

GG: Oh, no, no, no, no. You have to know how to figure and write, especially in English, all that because you cannot be a businessman. You cannot be a salesman. You have to know about math.

WN: By that time, when you started working at Nagatani Store, did you know how to read and talk English?

GG: I know because in the Philippines, from the first grade until college graduate, they don't teach any other language. They only teach English. So, any people from the Philippines, they can speak English. That's why when I came here, I never get hard time. But only I get little bit hard time in the beginning because I had a Hawaiian supervisor. And then, [he would say], "Go up; go daun bilo." Eh, what is "daun bilo"? (Laughs) "Go mauka." So, I did not catch on. It takes time for me to catch on.

WN: This was your luna?

GG: Yeah, yeah. Was my supervisor, the luna.

WN: When you applied for that work in the store, were there other people who applied, too?

GG: Ah, some others, too. But they [Nagatanis] wen take the words of my friend who was working in a store that, "This man is really good, and you can depend on him." That's why they wen hire me.

WN: Were you the only Filipino applying?

GG: I had one more. Another guy wen apply. But they wen take me because [he went] himself, [he went] alone and asked [for] the job. But like me, I went [with] the friend of the owner of the

store, he knows him.

He wen bring me to him, and say, "Okay. If he like work, he can work tomorrow already."

So, I told him, "No, I got to prepare everything. And if I can, I (am) going (to) start next week."

So he says, "Okay."

WN: What were your duties then, working in the store?

GG: From the beginning, I was a clerk. You know, people in the camp coming down to the store, I have to write [out] their orders, what they buy, anything. And what they cannot carry [home], I have to go deliver to their house.

WN: Now, these camps, you're talking about the Wailuku Sugar Mill camps or the Puunene camps?

GG: Oh, that was the Wailuku Sugar.

WN: Wailuku Sugar. Were there any HC&S people who came to that store?

GG: No, no, no, no. Nobody. Only myself.

WN: I see. Okay, you said that you were the clerk in the store. Was there a cash register in the store?

GG: Yeah. We had cash register.

WN: How long did it take you to learn?

GG: Every morning, the boss instruct me. How to go press this one, this the figure, this, that. Well, after two, three days, I catch everything. I catch on.

WN: Were you the only clerk in the store?

GG: Yeah, I was the only one. We were only three guys--the boss, the mother, and myself. It's run by family.

WN: Do you think that you got hired because you could speak English, or you could speak Ilocano?

GG: The reason why they wen hire me, I was recommended by my good friend working in the store. And then, I can speak any language from the Philippines. I can speak Ilocano, English and Tagalog. So, those are the things that you have to know when you go meet people in the camp. You can speak to them. [If] they cannot speak to you in Ilocano--they don't understand each other--you speak English, you can understand.



- WN: How about the Japanese people. Did you communicate with them?
- GG: Yes. Because that was a Japanese store, so plenty Japanese come. Well, me, the only clerk so I have to make their order--whatever they buy. Because only me and the boss work inside the store.
- WN: I see. What kind of things did the store sell?
- GG: They had general merchandise. They sell dry goods, groceries.
- WN: Fresh groceries?
- GG: Yes. Uh huh.
- WN: You mean, like meat . . .
- GG: No, no. That's not groceries, that's meat, now. Groceries is the one that we buy mostly from Japan before. Just like tako, ebi, or tempura like that. Some other stuff.
- WN: As you look back at the experience of working in the Nagatani Store, do you feel that it prepared you for when you opened your own store eventually?
- GG: I did not think of opening my business while I just came from a small store. But it gives me a big experience while I was working in a big department store, like in the plantation store.
- WN: Oh, later on, you started working in a plantation store, yeah? Okay, we can get to that little later. You said that you went to the camps to deliver, also. Did you do any kind of delivering on the Puunene side while you were working at Nagatani Store?
- GG: Oh, while I was in Nagatani Store, I go in Puunene because that's where I come from, and then I know all those people who was buying over there. So, I prepared to go on all the camps mostly. I go in HC&S before. I go in the Camp 7 and Camp 5, Camp 4. Those are the camps that I go before.
- WN: So when you started at Nagatani Store, before you came, all they did was service the Wailuku Sugar Mill people?
- GG: [GG misinterprets question.] From the beginning, I just do only serving, maybe about three months. About three months, I think.
- WN: Just the Wailuku . . .
- GG: Yeah. Just to get the experience in the store. I have to stay for little while inside the store to learn everything because to go out in the camp and [be a] salesman, you don't know what you are going to sell in the store. You have to learn plenty. It's not only 100, it is by 1,000 items that you have to know. You go in

the camp. When they ask you anything, you are ready to answer whether get or no more, and what is the price. They have to know. So, it takes me about three months to learn [all] this inside the store, and then, go outside [and be a salesman].

WN: Oh, I see. You went out to the HC&S camps to take orders and deliver?

GG: Take order, uh huh.

WN: So, then it was good that they hired you because you knew some people in Puunene.

GG: Yeah, I know them already. That's why that was my advantage of making the business because I know them [customers] already.

WN: When you were working in Puunene, HC&S, what camp did you live in?

GG: I was living in Spanish B.

WN: Why did you leave the Nagatani Store?

GG: At that time, they told me that they are going to sell the store because the owner of the store was getting too old. So, he prepared to sell the store. At that time, I went back again to HC&S to work as a laborer again.

WN: What kind of work did you do?

GG: Well, at that time, I was an irrigator. From 1933 to 1937, I was an irrigator.

WN: How did you compare that work with the work you did in the store?

GG: (Laughs) Oh, I did not have a good feeling at that time. I was really disgusted because working in the store is much easier life. Rain or shine, you don't have to worry. And then, I stay in the shade, yeah?

WN: Let's go back a little bit, now. When you working in the store, did you have a helper with you go out to take orders and deliver?

GG: No, I was alone. Nobody help me. Only the boss help me load up the truck--the rice, all the groceries inside the truck--and then, only myself, go deliver. Deliver and then take order at same time.

WN: So, you would go to one house, drop off merchandise, and then . . .

GG: Take order if anything they forget yesterday, like that.

WN: How would you know which houses to go to?

GG: I was living in Puunene, and I know most of those people already.



I know where they live, I know where they stay, and I know whether good or no good.

WN: "Good or no good." What do you mean by that?

GG: Yeah. (Chuckles) Well, by looking at them personally, their attitude. It must be good because so nice. So, I think that way.

WN: How would they pay you?

GG: While I was working in that store, I was getting only \$1.35 one day.

WN: No, I mean how did the customers pay? Was it by credit?

GG: Oh, that's by credit. They have to pay me at every end of the month because they're getting paid at the end of the month. Once a month, they get paid.

WN: Once a month they would get paid at the end of the month. Would you bill them? How would you get them to pay their bill?

GG: Oh, I have to go collect from house to house.

WN: Did you have trouble at all collecting from a lot of people?

GG: Well, so far, I did not have any trouble because they were so nice, too. During the payday, I just go in their house. They were ready to pay me. I did not have no trouble.

WN: Do you know about how many regular customers you had in Puunene?

GG: About that time, I think maybe about 100 persons.

WN: One hundred customers. And before you started working for Nagatani Store, those people bought from somewhere else?

GG: Yeah. Those people were buying from all different stores, because there were many stores going in the camp before. So, when I go, they buying from me. Some, they don't exactly buy 100 percent from me, but they was buying from others, too. They split the buying place. They buy from me, some; they buy from the other stores, some.

WN: Were these Filipino and Japanese customers?

GG: Yeah. That was Filipino and Japanese. But I get 75 percent of the Filipinos customers [i.e., 75 percent of GG's customers were Filipino]. And then, 25 percent of the other nationality.

WN: Seventy-five percent of your customers?

GG: Yeah, of my customers.

WN: So, you were saying that when you went back as a laborer--HC&S--you didn't like it. Was the pay any better?

GG: Well, it was a little bit better.

WN: Then, later on, you became a tractor driver?

GG: At the end of two years here, contract and irrigation, I changed my mind. Even a boy that never go school, he can handle this kind job, [GG thought]. I think might as well I go try another job. So, I wen go try and apply as a helper for a tractor operator. Then from there, after three months, I start learning how to drive [tractor] already. Within six months of that, I became a permanent driver.

WN: So, that is actually a skilled job?

GG: Uh huh [yes]. It's a hard job because the dust that you get when you go work on the Caterpillar was terrible. The dust, you had to eat all the dust.

WN: Did your pay increase?

GG: Yeah. That was an increase again.

WN: Very much?

GG: Not very much. That was another dollar half [\$1.50] one day. (Laughs) That's a dollar half [\$1.50] one day.

WN: While you were working as a tractor driver, did you ever think back and wish you were back in the store?

GG: Oh, well, I was thinking, "I think I have to go back to the store." Maybe.

But my wife says, "Hey, you get enough experience already. No use go back. Maybe you find a different job that you can get more money."

So, I tell her, "Wait, wait, wait. When time comes. We cannot tell." So I stick up on that job for little while.

WN: You stayed there for about three years, yeah?

GG: Three years, yeah.

WN: In 1941, you moved on to another job?

GG: In 1941, yeah, I move again. The boss of the tractor department, he was the head for that school bus. He wen pick me up and give me a promotion to go drive school bus. That capacity of the bus is fifty passengers.

WN: So, you took the schoolchildren from where to where?

GG: In the morning, I go pick up them to their house and then, come back. Then about 2:30 again in the afternoon, I bring them home.

WN: This is the Puunene School?

GG: That's only the Puunene one.

WN: Did you like that job better than the tractor driving?

GG: That job was really good because you have to use, oh, everyday, clean clothes with all the children. From grade school to high school, I bring them. So, you have to get [wear] the clean clothes every day. But in that bus driver [job], I did not feel so good because some people in there, when you don't wait for them for little while, they grumble; they squawk; they go report you that you never wait for them. That was my little bit headache, you know. Why, I cannot be waiting for them all the time because the people are also waiting for me on the other side. So, I had to go. If I cannot wait him certain time, I had to go.

WN: Were there certain stops that you made, or . . .

GG: Yes. There was a certain stop for me to pick them up.

WN: Would you go to every camp?

GG: Only certain camp, I go. Those people that are far away from school, like that. Yeah, those are those camps that I go pick up.

WN: The rest, the would just walk . . .

GG: Well, they go because their school is close to the place, yeah? Houses.

WN: You said you had to wear clean clothes every day. Did you have to wear a uniform or something?

GG: No. Got to use aloha shirt.

WN: How would you compare that school bus job to the store job?

GG: The store job is little bit different because there was no complaint. They only complain when I don't deliver the merchandise. Rain or shine, it rain, I don't go out. I stay in the store. When you driving the bus, rain or shine, you have to go out and take the children.

WN: Where was the school that you dropped the children off at?

GG: That was the Puunene School, and then, bring them to the Baldwin

High School. The high school students, I have to bring them Baldwin High School.

WN: Oh, I see. So, you take the elementary school children to Puunene School . . .

GG: First, yeah. First. And then, from there, I bring them to the Baldwin High School.

WN: In Wailuku?

GG: In Wailuku.

WN: Did the children have---could they catch the train to go to Baldwin?

GG: No. There was no train. The only transportation they have is the bus.

WN: So, you drove the bus during the war years, then?

GG: Yes. Uh huh. Just before and during the war.

WN: During the war, did you have to take any kind of precautions while you drove the bus?

GG: Oh, yes. There were so many army tanks, army trucks, running in the night. That was terrible. That was very dangerous because they don't stop on the crossing. They just go right through. The only way I could tell that there is something that coming up [is] if I see the light that shining up road. Then I have to slow down.

WN: Then you started working in 1944 at the Camp 5 Plantation Store?

GG: Yes.

WN: How did you get that job?

GG: Well, at that time I was a bus driver. Then they told me, "We are looking for a salesman for the store. We want an experienced one. Do you want to come and apply for the job?" My friend told me. The one working in Camp 5 Store.

So, I tell 'em, "I had been long time in [store] business, and then you mean I going back again?"

"Well, it's easier job than go drive bus. With all the responsibility that you have. You have fifty passengers in there. Shee, boy, I don't know why you don't like to come down there [Camp 5 Store]. It's better. And we can give you a higher pay." So, he tell me, "You sure?"

I tell, "Yes, yes."

Because the boss told me, "If you are having so much in that bus driver [job], then we can give you a little bit higher [pay]."

WN: Than what you were making as a bus driver?

GG: While I was making a bus driver, I was only having \$1.65 one day. But I had plenty overtime. In Saturdays and Sundays, I have to bring people going down the beach--picnic. And some groups like that, associations like that, they like use the bus. So, I have to go on what day they going. That much time I get, and I had plenty time. I get little bit more money, pay, than what I used to have before.

WN: Were you the only bus driver?

GG: Yeah, I was the only one.

WN: For the entire company?

GG: Yeah, entire company.

WN: Okay. You said the boss of the Camp 5 Store came up to you and asked if you wanted to work in the store? [It was GG's friend, not the Camp 5 Store boss.]

GG: Yes. They came to my house many times. They like to take me because I have the experience already. Some other people, they said, plenty of them wen apply the job already. But they never think of them because to train a guy to work in a business takes time. If he's slow, it takes you one year to train a guy to know everything inside the store. So, they prefer to take me because when I go inside there, they did not [have to] tell me anything already. When I start work, I knew what I was doing. I know what merchandise they get.

WN: How did the boss know that you had previous experience?

GG: No. My friend that was working in the Camp 5 Store, he know me very well in the plantation from labor until that time. He knows me well.

WN: He told your boss?

GG: Yeah. He told me about that.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Okay, Mr. Guerrero, I'd like to back up just a little bit to when

you were working out in the fields for HC&S. In 1937, there was a Filipino strike? Do you remember anything about that?

GG: Yeah. We had a leader that organized that union [Vibora Luviminda]. But we never succeed because there were plenty guys that go work-- other nationality that go work like Japanese, Portuguese, Hawaiian, Chinese. They all go work. Like us [Filipinos], we never go work. So, the only way we was doing at that time, they send us out of the plantation. Take all your suitcase, everything, they send us to the beach and stay there.

WN: Who? The management?

GG: The management of the plantation wen send us out.

WN: Was that [the leader of the union] Antonio Fagel?

GG: Antonio Fagel, yeah.

WN: About when did he actually organize that group?

GG: That was [existing] already in 1936, but never go into effect until 1937.

WN: Did he try to organize the other ethnic groups?

GG: Yeah, he tried, but he cannot because those days, it's [wages] only a dollar a day. Mostly all Japanese, the Japanese, they said they don't want because they have children to go school. They have to support, and if they stop working, they will have no money to send the children to school. But the Filipinos, they can afford to go on a strike because majority of the Filipinos were single at that time.

WN: What kind of things did Mr. Fagel tell you folks?

GG: We try our best to hold back--not to go back [to work]--within so many months. Maybe it was about three months. We hold it back. But we never succeed. Although we never succeed, we gain some kind of benefit in the plantation. They had raise up little bit the pay.

WN: They did raise the pay?

GG: They did raise the pay.

WN: What were some of the grievances that you folks had?

GG: At that time, they want a little bit higher pay and condition of living, but the plantation did not pay attention to this.

WN: Did you folks have a lot of meetings?

GG: Well, at that time, we had meetings, but we cannot make a meeting in the plantation property. We have to go outside to hold that meeting.

WN: Where did you go?

GG: Mostly we go into the parks, like that, and have the meeting.

WN: What percentage, do you think, of the Filipino workers were involved in the strike?

GG: At that time, maybe about 90 percent were on strike. And then, 10 percent . . . . Well, those married people, most of them never join the strike because they have families and children to support. So, the majority was only single people.

WN: By walking out for three months, what did you folks hope to accomplish?

GG: We was asking for a higher pay, but the plantation, they never give anything. They deny everything what our leader was trying to ask for them.

WN: Was he asking for higher pay just for Filipino workers?

GG: No, for everybody. So, they did not give. Nothing.

WN: So, the management kicked you folks off the plantation?

GG: Out of the plantation. Out of the plantation house, out of the plantation. And send us . . . . They have a truck that load up your things, your suitcase; bring you to the beach. By Maui Dry Goods---by the Kahului side before. We have a small camp over there. Tent. By the beach side. That's a government property. So, they cannot do anything to us.

WN: Then what happened?

GG: Well, it happened. We wen go back work. We start again, then work. Our leader wants to reorganize, but many of the leaders, they change their mind that maybe some days, we have to wait a little while. If the Japanese people will join the Filipino, guarantee we can ask our demand. But Japanese never like because them is 90 percent married. And the Filipino is 90 percent single. So, cannot get that demand.

WN: How long did you stay out on the beach?

GG: It's about close to three months. We go back to the plantation, they take us, but we had to go work in the fields right away. So, we wen go back work.

WN: Did you go back into the same house . . .



GG: The same house. The same job.

WN: Did any people lose their job permanently?

GG: At that time, nobody. You like go back, you like change job, you can always change job.

WN: This Mr. Fagel, what became of him after the strike?

GG: I didn't see anything on him. He was only working by himself at that time. He was a working as insurance man, I think, at that time.

WN: At the time of the strike?

GG: Yeah, at the time of the strike.

WN: Insurance man for who?

GG: I don't know. I don't recall the company that he was working, but he was working for somebody else at that time. He was not a plantation laborer.

WN: So, how did you feel while you were out on the beach? Did you expect to get your raise in pay, or did you . . . . How did you feel?

GG: We don't expect anything because we can feel already that the Filipinos is not enough to go on a strike and to stop the plantation-- just like the sugar mill to stop grinding. Because it's still grinding.

WN: Did you feel that you wanted to get back to work?

GG: At that time, sure. Everybody wants to go back because those days, we never get enough money. Of course, get plenty donation from other people, but that donation is only to feed us down the beach. But your spending money, we never get nothing. (Chuckles)

WN: You said you got some donations. Did you get donations from private people, or . . .

GG: Oh, yeah. Plenty from private people, like that. We had plenty.

WN: How about stores?

GG: Many of them donate, too. Yeah, that was terrific. On the food, we never spend nothing because all donation. But we were worrying on money that we get in our pocket, because no more spending money, yeah?

WN: Do you remember what stores helped in donating?



- GG: See, I know mostly that donate--that big store--was the Maui Dry Goods Company. He was really helping--all the rice and plenty. And these farmers living in Kula, they bring the trucks with how many bags of cabbage. They bring down. That's how we live.
- WN: Did any of the smaller stores help out, too?
- GG: I don't know, because it's mostly only big stores that was helping us.
- WN: Now, getting back to 1944, when you were working in the HC&S Camp 5 Store, what type of work did you do?
- GG: The first time, I was a clerk inside there. Serving the customers who come. Those who wants to buy. See what merchandise they want. So, I do all those things.
- WN: Who was your boss?
- GG: That was Japanese man in the name of Mr. Tanaka. I don't know his first name. I know only Tanaka. (Chuckles)
- WN: Did you do order taking and delivering also?
- GG: At that time while I was there, I was working inside [the store] there. Then I was only a clerk. After that, some of the salesman that [were] going out in the camp and take order, some of them take vacation. I take their place from the time they take vacation. One month, if they stay one month, I going be there working for one month.
- WN: Did the Camp 5 Store service all the camps or just Camp 5?
- GG: Yes. They had one store in Spreckelsville [Camp 1 Store] that service up all those camps in the other side. And then, in the Camp 5 Store, they serve all that people--HC&S people--on this side. Like Camp 5, Camp 4, William Camp, Camp 6, Camp 7, and Camp 13, Camp 12.
- WN: How about Alabama and McGerrow?
- GG: This all Camp 5. We call it Camp 5 [i.e., Alabama Village and McGerrow Village are both a part of Camp 5]. So, those are the camps that the plantation [store] was serving.
- WN: How many homes do you think Camp 5 [Store] served?
- GG: Oh, that's plenty. Over 1,000 homes. Maybe more.
- WN: How many order takers and delivery boys did they have?
- GG: They had four taking orders, and they had another three truck drivers delivering.

WN: Four order boys and three truck drivers. Okay. How would they schedule when do they go out and take orders?

GG: They schedule by district by district. Supposing that he go to McGerrow Camp, that day he go to McGerrow Camp. The next day, he go to Alabama Camp or Spanish A [Camp]. He take that place. The next day, he go again. In one week time, the salesman [order man] go two times. Two routes. They have to go around two rounds in the plant . . .

WN: So, they go a thousand homes two times a week?

GG: Two times a week, yeah.

WN: That's a lot.

GG: Yeah, yeah. With that four salesmen [order men].

WN: So, every home would expect to see the order man coming two times a week?

GG: Two times a week on a certain day.

WN: Oh, you had set days?

GG: Yes, set days already, see?

WN: How many homes would one order man cover in one day?

GG: It's hard to say because some houses, they go in there. When he [order man] ask when no more nothing to order, he got to go next house again. Then the other house, he go take order. Then the other two houses said [when they have nothing to order], "Next time come." You know? But he got to call on the house and ask them if they have something to order. They have to go to the house. He go see them. So, it's plenty houses to go because if he go to Alabama and Mill Camp, that's plenty [houses] to go. See, but he can go all. Because he has to go start--the salesman [order man]--he got to go out starting . . . . He call on the Japanese; all get families. They can go start [taking orders] from 2 o'clock.

WN: Two p.m.?

GG: Two o'clock p.m. until 4:00 or 4:30.

WN: So, he would just [be] out for about 2-1/2 hours every day?

GG: About 2-1/2 hours to three hours. Sometimes, it's 5 o'clock, see? It depends how . . .

WN: Would he cover every house? How would he know which houses to go to?

GG: Yeah, yeah. He know what houses he's going. He got to cover all the houses.

WN: So, the order man would go out. Would he have a delivery boy with him to deliver at the same time?

GG: No. The order man--when he comes back [to the store] the next morning--he make his order, put 'em in the truck, then the delivery man go. They just give the bill. The delivery man is making the order. The salesman [order man], I should say. Excuse me.

WN: So, the order man would go . . .

GG: And make his order [i.e., gather merchandise and group them according to each customer's order].

WN: . . . from about 2 o'clock to about 5 o'clock every day?

GG: Yeah, every day. Yeah. Uh huh.

WN: Then he would come back to the store . . .

GG: The next day.

WN: Oh, the next day. Okay. And then, there would be people at the store filling out the orders?

GG: No, [the order man] going make their order. The next morning, they make their order. They prepare everything, put 'em in the boxes, and then just put the number of the box. If it's house 594, he put [write] the house 594 [on the box]. He get the bill. The delivery man just look the number of the house, then bring 'em to the house.

WN: Would the salesman get any kind of commission or anything for this kind of work?

GG: No, they have the regular salary.

WN: When the salesman [order man] comes in the next morning with his list or orders, how many people would be helping him fill out the orders?

GG: If like us, clerks, we are not so busy, we help him. But if we are busy, he has to do himself. Because in the afternoon, the delivery man go out 2 o'clock. So, from in the morning--7:30 in the morning to 2:00--he get plenty time to make his order.

WN: What about the people who dropped in to buy something but couldn't carry it?

GG: Oh, yeah. They have to wait. If he lives in certain camp, they have to look up the salesman [order man] that went to that camp,

and then tell him to make ready for this order. Us [clerks], we prepare the order, and then we bring the order to the truck driver. "And this is the house number for this camp." So, he go deliver.

WN: I guess in those days, some people had phones?

GG: Not those days. No, only the stores, restaurants before, or clubhouse, they had telephone. Houses never had telephone before.

WN: Did the Camp 5 Store have a phone?

GG: Oh, yes. They have.

WN: Would people call from somewhere to place an order?

GG: Those days, when they want something, they have to come down the store, unless this guy, he has a store or a restaurant nearby his house, and he can go use the telephone. Otherwise, they got to come down to the store and give their order.

WN: Did you do any of the delivering or order taking?

GG: Yes. When some of those salesman, they take vacation, I go. I go take the order, but I never go deliver, though.

WN: So, the deliveries would be done by . . .

GG: By the regular guys who deliver.

WN: Were there any mistakes?

GG: Well (chuckles), it's human being. It's bound to get some mistakes. Some [customers] say he never get this, some say he never get that. So, we don't want make an argument, see? We look the bill, he say he never get this, okay, we give you back. You take 'em. You said one can of the cream . . . . You said supposed to order one dozen, and you had only eleven, we give you the one can.

WN: Would there be any people who sort of cheated on it, and . . . .

GG: No, I don't think so. Maybe, you know, when you do lots of job, it's bound to make mistakes because us, all human beings. We bound to make mistake.

WN: Were there any really big mistakes?

GG: So far in my experience, I never come across.

WN: What kind of complaints did the customers have?

GG: Mostly in sending the bills. How much they bought, what merchandise they get, the balance, like that. Sometime, the bookkeeper made

mistake. Instead of get balance so much, maybe about fifty dollars, and then, sometime come to sixty dollars, then they have to complain.

WN: I see. When you folks bill them at the end of the month, what information would it have on the bill?

GG: When we bill them, we have only statement. On that statement, it shows what he bought, so much. He bought maybe thirty dollars [worth]. In the second time, so much, maybe about ten dollars. In the third one, he bought so much, maybe another ten dollars. And then, put the date. We don't put [list] the merchandise inside there. Only the date and the amount he bought.

WN: And when you folks delivered each time, would they get a receipt saying what they bought?

GG: No, we don't make that. We had the bill of the merchandise, and the bill of the merchandise, we put 'em in the grocery [office]. It's up to them to check up.

WN: When they would get billed, who would they pay? They would pay the order man?

GG: Oh, no. They come pay down the stores. Salesman [order men] going to the camp, they don't pay to them because they were already advised not to receive any payment, see? They have to come down the stores and pay.

WN: Did they have to pay the whole balance at the end of the month?

GG: Well, those days, [if someone had a] big family like that, it's hard for them to pay one time. So, if the husband is an irrigator, then they had a bonus. After they harvest the cane, they had a bonus. And from there, they can pay all their balance.

WN: You mean they got a bonus?

GG: They had a bonus when they [harvest] their cane, they had so much money they make. So, sometime, they get \$800, \$500 bonus, like that. Or \$1,000.

WN: Oh, I see. Like kompang?

GG: Yeah, kompang. They call it kompang, that irrigator. Yeah, irrigation.

WN: After eighteen months [the cane is harvested] . . .

GG: Yeah, eighteen months. Those are the ones that we allow in the store to get little bit big balance because they get the money coming in.

WN: But the regular people who did regular hāpai kō . . .

GG: If the bill is little bit too big, we stop them. Not exactly stop. We limit them. They buy so that they can pay their bills next time. If he can pay only forty dollars [one month], then we limit him to buy twenty dollars [the following month]. So he can pay on his balance every month.

WN: Is there a minimum balance they had to pay?

GG: We base them according to how much pay they get. We make this way since they are plantation man. There was an agreement between the management of the plantation and the manager of the store that all those people who get balance, we tell the plantation to hold that money [pay] and send to Camp 5 Store. From there, [when] the person that owed the balance, he go get his check at the plantation, "Oh, Camp 5 Store get your check." From there, we deduct, and we give 'em so much.

WN: So, the HC&S Company [plantation] would give the store the whole paycheck?

GG: The whole paycheck, yeah. And then, send 'em to Camp 5 Store.

WN: Then you would take all the money that he owed from the paycheck?

GG: If he receive [in his paycheck] only, maybe, sixty dollars, you cannot take the sixty dollars. You got to leave [for him], maybe, about twenty dollars.

WN: I see. What would you consider a big bill? How much?

GG: Those days, when they get about sixty or seventy dollars one month already, that's our big bills.

WN: Would people get mad when they did that [paycheck deduction]?

GG: From the beginning, they used to get mad, but when they get used to already, just like nothing because he has to buy his living. No other stores going give them the credit. Outside stores, they don't give because they [first] find out if he get [owes] balance to Camp 5 Store. [if he does], they will not sell [to] him. So there is no way to get away from the balance. He has to pay the balance because he cannot buy [from anyplace].

WN: What about if a worker's wife would run up a big bill? Would that be the same thing?

GG: The only thing the clerk will do is check up his bills, if they know. Because we get all the information in there [store office], we get all the lists. Those guys who get the big bill, we have to limit them--how much they can buy.

WN: So, if the wife runs up the bill, it would be same thing?



GG: Yeah. Well, mostly, the husband going to tell us that, "If my wife come, don't give 'em any kind. You give 'em so much only. You give 'em more, I will not pay."

So, we mark 'em inside there; we make a note over there. "So-and-so, bangō 2549, says limit--twenty dollars one month." So, we cannot go over the twenty dollars because over twenty dollars, he going fight you back.

WN: What if an outside person--person who didn't come from the camps or work for the company--could he shop in the plantation stores?

GG: He could shop if he going pay cash, but not charge. It should be cash.

WN: How did the prices compare with outside stores?

GG: Plantation stores was cheaper than outside store.

WN: For example, one can of corned beef, how . . .

GG: Yeah. One can of corned beef, if it was before, the corned beef used to be, maybe, nineteen, eighteen cents. Camp 5 Store sell 'em for fifteen cents. Sometime, two, three cents cheaper.

WN: How did they manage to make it cheaper?

GG: You know the plantation store [system], they have a wholesale store [i.e., Kahului Store]. The wholesale store is the distributor of the whole Maui. So, the Camp 5 Store buys cheaper, then we can sell it cheaper.

WN: What other wholesalers besides the HC&S Kahului [Store] did the Camp 5 Store deal with?

GG: There were only two wholesalers in Maui. There were the Maui Dry Goods and HC&S.

WN: So, would Camp 5 Store deal with Maui Dry Goods a lot?

GG: Camp 5 Store, we don't deal with Maui Dry Goods because we have our wholesale store.

WN: I see. So, it was exclusively HC&S?

GG: Yeah, uh huh.

WN: How would the goods arrive to the Camp 5 Store from Kahului?

GG: Before, there was a man working at Camp 5 Store. He used to go pick up those groceries down A&B [GG is referring to HC&S] wholesale department [i.e., Kahului Store]. But when I stayed there little

bit longer, they wen assign me to go and pick up--drive the truck--go pick up all this merchandise groceries from the wholesaler.

WN: Did any come on the railroad?

GG: No. We have to go pick up on the truck.

WN: You would go to the A&B [Alexander & Baldwin] Commercial Company to pick up? [It was called HC&S Kahului Store until 1950. It became known as A&B Commerical Company in 1950].

GG: Yeah, every morning. Every day, I go. But before I go, I had to check up the shelves; I had check up the warehouse how many things I going to buy. Supposing, now, I go check up the Carnation milk, and I have only twenty more [cases] left. I go put the order--fifty cases. All right. I make the order, now, fifty cases. Corned beef, another fifty cases because in the warehouse, I have only ten cases. And then, another--sausage for example--I put another fifty cases, but over there I have another twenty. I have to show that to the boss. If these fifty cases is okay . . . . If he said no 'nough, instead of fifty cases, he put seventy-five. He correct mine. Whatever merchandise I get inside there--what I have on the list that I going to buy--he has to check up before I go make the order.

WN: So, it was your job to look into the warehouse and see what's coming short?

GG: That is my job. Every morning, when I start to work in the morning--because we start 7:30--I had the book already. Write 'em all on the . . . . Sometimes I go from shelf to shelf, I check up. From there I go to the warehouse and compare how much canned goods I get in the shelves and how much cases I get inside the warehouse. Then I put it down all in the list. Everything. What we have inside there, I have to put it down in the list.

WN: What if you wanted to order something new? What would you do?

GG: They always called up. The wholesale department always called up the manager of the store to say that, "We have a new merchandise coming in. Do you want to try? This and that?"

And then, when I go, he [manager] give me a piece of paper, "New merchandise--take only five case." See? So, that's how it works.

WN: What were some of the best-selling items? The most popular items?

GG: In my experience, this milk--Carnation milk--sausage, spam, corned beef. Those are the best sellers in the stores. You have these items, people no starve. (Chuckles)

WN: How about rice?



GG: Oh, that's the main thing. That's the main thing.

(Laughter)

GG: That's the main thing, the rice. Because, like Oriental people, they have to live on rice.

WN: Did the wholesaling department carry Filipino food and Japanese foods, too?

GG: Well, at that time, the Filipinos, we never had yet. Only the Japanese merchandise. Only Japanese dry goods.

WN: Where did the Filipinos go at that time in 1944? If the Camp 5 Store didn't sell Filipino foods, where did they go to buy it?

GG: Filipinos get used to the Japanese food already. So, what the Japanese eat, Filipinos eat. So, we never get hard time on that.

WN: What were the hours of the Camp 5 Store?

GG: Before, we start 7:30 [a.m.] to 4:30 [p.m.]. If that is a long day. If it is a short day, we start 7 o'clock to 4 o'clock.

WN: What about during holidays? Did you open any extra hours?

GG: No, if regular holidays, we close.

WN: How about like Christmas time?

GG: Christmas time, regular Christmas Day, [December] twenty-fifth, and New Year, we close.

WN: Yeah, but around that time, did you have to work extra?

GG: We never worked extra. They have to give us because we start from 7:30 [a.m.] to 4:30 [p.m.] already. So, they never give us extra. And people knows already that we close the store at 4:30. They have to come before 4:30.

WN: What time would most people get off work?

GG: You mean in the morning?

WN: No, get off the fields? What time would it end?

GG: Oh, they get off the fields at 4:30 [p.m.].

WN: They get off at 4:30 [p.m.]. So, how could they come in to shop?

GG: Sometime, those people, they come more early, then they come shop. So, most of the time, when they come home late--yeah, 4:30 [p.m.]--

then we adjust the time in the plantation store. Instead of 7:30 [a.m.], we start 8 o'clock. Because many people were complaining before. When they come home, they cannot catch the store. So, we start 8 o'clock until 5 o'clock. So they [had] plenty time, yeah? Half an hour. Because once the people stay there [inside the store], even we say until 5 o'clock, we don't close the store 5 o'clock. We have to let ourselves give the service on until 5:30 or 6:00.

WN: So, between 4:30 [p.m.] and 5:00, must have been real busy, eh?

GG: Yeah. Very busy, very busy.

WN: You actually worked in the Camp 5 Store towards the end of the war, yeah? From 1944 to about 1947. Was it more busy? Were there soldiers around?

GG: It was really busy during the war, but our merchandise or groceries is limited. They give us only an allotment. Before, we used to buy, maybe, fifty cases. Maybe they give us twenty cases [during the war]. Like spam, fifty cases before. If we could get twenty cases, we were lucky. Because they divide that. Because all those goods, groceries, they have to send 'em to the soldier--army. So, we didn't get enough.

WN: So, you folks sold less, then?

GG: We sold less, yeah.

WN: When the war ended, did you find there was a big difference?

GG: Oh, it's big difference because we can get everything what we want already. Like these can goods, there was no limit. You can get as much as you want.

WN: How did you deal with the different ethnic groups? Like when Japanese and Chinese came in, you could communicate easily?

GG: Because everybody speak English. Maybe most of the Japanese old people, they cannot speak good, but they can understand.

WN: Yeah. And the salesmen [order men] and the delivery boys, were there some Filipinos and some Japanese . . .

GG: Oh, yes. That's all mix up. Yeah. Get Japanese--mostly on Japanese.

WN: Did they say, well, the Japanese go in certain part of the camps and Filipinos go . . .

GG: No. In certain part of the camp, if it is the route of that man, if he's Japanese, regardless of Japanese or Filipino, he take all that route in that camp. So that the other salesmen [order man] will have chance to go to the other camp.

WN: Whose job was it to determine what the retail price was for each item?

GG: We had an assistant bookkeeper. He's the one giving all the prices. What the percentage was going to be. [For example], this is 18 percent; this is 19 percent. They mark up, like that. Or this is 15 percent. See? They had--I don't know what they call that--Japanese kind for figure all this.

WN: Oh, abacus?

GG: Yeah. They had that one, and they know how much already. This is 15 percent, 18 percent. The most high before was 20 percent.

WN: The highest markup?

GG: Yeah, the highest we mark up. We get 20 percent. Most, 15, 16, 17, 18 [percent].

WN: After the war ended, was there a difference in prices between during the war and after the war?

GG: After the war, there was no control already. Because they was controlling prices before [i.e., during the war]. So, we can set the price [after the war]. If you want a 20 percent [markup], you take 20 percent. But make sure that it will not be too much difference with the other stores.

WN: Did the price regulations during the war hurt the business a lot?

GG: No, no, no, no. Because they had a good markup during the war.

WN: You were also working Camp 5 Store when the union came in [1946], yeah?

GG: Yes, uh huh.

WN: Did you see any changes in the buying habits of the people after they got their union recognition?

GG: There was a big difference when there was a union because the wages came high. And then, they could buy little bit more. So, the pay is going to be higher. That's why people can buy little bit more.

WN: Did you really notice that?

GG: Yeah, I take notice. Yeah, yeah. When there was a union. But at that time, the union cannot do so much because that was only beginning.

WN: Were you still at Camp 5 Store when the 1947 strike was going on? Oh, 1946 strike.

GG: Nineteen forty-six [1946], is. Nineteen forty-six, yeah. I was still there.

WN: What do you remember about that strike?

GG: While I was working in the plantation [store], by giving the merchandise, every clerk is instructed to give so much, only. So much. If he order this, we give this so much. When the big family come, we give more. Especially in rice.

WN: You mean, you giving them . . .

GG: Yeah. We had to give them more. Little bit more. Because everything was ration during the war. So, we have to limit so many person, so much. How many pound per person.

WN: You're talking about during the strike?

GG: During the strike.

WN: You were working at Camp 5 Store during the strike. So, when you said you have to "give" a certain amount . . .

GG: Oh, yeah. Because, at that time, we had to limit them. The buying.

WN: Oh, you limited the buying. I see. Why did you have to do that?

GG: Because we never get enough [merchandise] at that time yet.

WN: During the strike?

GG: Yeah, during the strike. And on top that--during the strike--the people that go on a strike, they cannot buy in the store. So, that's why we have to limit [the amount sold to] those people who are working.

WN: So, during the strike, was there a shortage of supplies in the store?

GG: Yeah. Because the preparation of the people--the strikers--they had to be prepared. That's why many guys buy plenty merchandise one time. All the time, it's [merchandise] packed up in his house. Some never prepare, and no more. That's why we have to limit.

WN: I still don't understand why there was shortage of goods during the strike.

GG: Because everybody get panic. Those people, "We going to strike. Get prepared." They get panic, now. So, they had to be prepared. In that way, the only solution that we can do--us, working in the store--we had to limit so that those people who get hard time, we get the merchandise to sell.

WN: I see. So, when the strike first came out, some people started buying a lot of things?

GG: A lot! Rice, can goods, anything. Stack up in their house.  
That's why the shortage. (Chuckles)

WN: I see.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 7-6-1-79; SIDE ONE

WN: Okay, Mr. Guerrero, as far as inventory is concerned, working at the Camp 5 Store, could you sort of explain how inventory was taken?

GG: Oh, yes. Inventory, you had to know. Not anybody can do it. They had to learn how to inventory because the merchandise that we have in there is not by hundreds, it's by thousands. Then when we make the inventory the end of the year, we have to go item by item. The worst one to do is the extension. You got to extend on the prices--cost price. So, it's a hard job on that.

WN: So you knew what the cost was of each item?

GG: Yes. I know. Because, me, the one go take the order from A&B wholesaler store [Kahului Store]. Then I get all the prices--the cost price inside there. Me, the only one know [the cost price]. Plus the boss. See, I know all that. Because we cannot show all those [cost] prices to the other guy. Only me, because I get the bill.

WN: There wasn't any type of cost code on each . . .

GG: We have to use that. Because the code is a secret kind. Not anybody can read, that one.

WN: So, only you and your boss knew that code?

GG: The bookkeeper, the secretary, like that. They had to know.

WN: You were the only one who took inventory?

GG: No. All of us. All the workers. From salesmen [order men], all the boss, everybody. We have assigned [areas]. The main thing they do is, "All right, you, Pedro, you take this place. You, George, you take this portion. You, you take this portion." So, when we start, we know. So that no conflicts with the other one. No more double job, like that [i.e., merchandise is not counted twice].

WN: How often would you take inventory?

GG: In the plantation store, we take only once a year.

WN: This is at the end of the year?

GG: End of the year.

WN: Would you close the store?

GG: We had to close the store to make sure that there is no mistake.

WN: So, how many days would it close?

GG: It is only a matter of two days.

WN: During the holidays--you know, during the Christmas time--would there be special kind of goods that you sell?

GG: At that time, we never do special kind. Because those days, we get so much percentage cut already, and the competition is not there. The plantation store is the cheapest store. Outside stores [prices] are more high. So that, they don't make any special sale.

WN: No special sales at all?

GG: No, no special sale. Those days, no more.

WN: What about items that were damaged, or produce became overripe, or something. Would you mark it down?

GG: Supposing can goods, now. If all smashed up, like that, they put that in the profit-and-loss. And they sell it among the workers. If the cost maybe ten cents, they give you [for] seven cents. Cheaper, see? Maybe [if] it cost another twenty cents, it cost you maybe only fourteen cents.

WN: So, this would be only among the [store] employees?

GG: Only among us, yeah. Everybody like because cheap. Only damage. That's nothing wrong. But if fruits, like that [became damaged], that is profit-and-loss.

WN: What other things would be considered losses?

GG: You have coffee, like that, in a glass, or guava jelly, and it happen drop down. Those are profit-and-loss.

WN: How about shoplifting?

GG: Those days, I think it's hard because you know why? It's different. It's not the way how supermarkets operate nowadays. The place before we had, the counter is all around [the store], and the merchandise is all behind the counter. The customers don't go inside the dry goods [section]. He just tell which one to pick up, we pick up [for him]. They stay in front the counter, and we

stay behind the counter. This is the counter, and this is the shelves. We pick up, we put them all. "Oh, I like that one. I like that one. I like that one." The counter is all around, see? (Laughs) Inside the store.

WN: So, as you walk into the store, first thing you see is the counter?

GG: Yeah, the counter.

WN: And then, you cannot go browsing around and pick up one thing . . .

GG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Unless some guys, they said, "Oh, can I go inside there?"

"Okay, you go." You know. We give them permission. But not supposed to come inside. But we don't want to hurt their feelings. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, must get busy, then. You must have a lot of clerks in the store.

GG: Oh, yes---oh, no. Because people, before, it's not like now when they come supermarket . . . . Before, when they come buy, they buy sometimes only two times one month, they buy. They buy the whole month's supply. So, it's not going to be busy. If little by little, it's going to be busy, but they buy plenty one time.

END OF INTERVIEW



Tape No. 7-58-2-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

George Guerrero (GG)

March 6, 1980

Kahului, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. George Guerrero. Today is March 6, 1980, and we're at his home in Kahului, Maui.

Okay, Mr. Guerrero, last time, we were talking about your background, and we talked about your various jobs and your experience in the Camp 5 [Plantation] Store, yeah? In 1946, you started Guerrero Store in Wailuku.

GG: Yes. I had started in that year, 1946.

WN: Why did you choose Wailuku as your site of your store?

GG: I chose Wailuku because Wailuku is close to the Filipino Camp, where people can come and buy by walking, without using their car.

WN: This camp is with the Wailuku Sugar Company?

GG: Wailuku Sugar Company.

WN: You knew a lot of people in Wailuku Sugar Company while you working Camp 5 Store?

GG: Yes, I know lots of people--Filipino people and other nationality--because my wife was from Wailuku, and we used to stay there often. So, I know most of the people.

WN: Did you ever want to, maybe, start your store in Puunene or Kahului?

GG: No, I didn't want that. If I make [a store] in Kahului or Puunene, the rent is too expensive on the plantation [land] because they quote you so much in rent, and then after that, you have to pay so much again if you over . . . . If you have a gross of, maybe, \$2,000, they will charge you another 10 percent above that. That's why I did not want that. That's too expensive for me.

WN: You mean, this is all over Kahului?



GG: That's over Kahului.

WN: Or just in the shopping center [Kahului Shopping Center]?

GG: No, all over Kahului.

WN: Why did Kahului charge that 10 percent?

GG: Well, I think that is their system, I guess, how they make, because they are not selling the property, they only lease the place. So, nobody can buy the place, so they have to [pay] rent plus percentage.

WN: The land was owned by . . .

GG: A&B [Alexander and Baldwin]. [Kahului land was owned by Kahului Railroad Company, a division of Alexander and Baldwin.]

WN: In Wailuku, who owned the land that you started your store on?

GG: Well, those are private properties.

WN: How much did you buy your property for? Your store?

GG: At that time when I bought--it was in 1948--one square foot was one dollar. That was very cheap, before. And the lot was 8,000 square foot.

WN: So, that came out to how much?

GG: Well, that's \$8,000, eh?

WN: Oh, I see.

GG: That's a dollar a square foot, I should say. That's a dollar a square foot.

WN: Did you move into an empty building?

GG: At the very beginning when I start making my business, I rent a building, which I was renting for, at that time, was forty-five dollars [a month]. And then, in 1948, that's when I start building my store--1948--I make a two-story building. Above is rooms. I made two rooms upstairs where I lived, so I don't have to go rent another house.

WN: When you built that new store in 1948, how much did that cost?

GG: At that time, it was very cheap. That cost me only \$15,000. That's [for] a concrete building.

WN: So, you opened your store in an older, rented building first, in 1946?

- GG: Yeah. I rent from a Japanese couple. That was an old store, but they quit already, because they retired. So, they rent it to me.
- WN: You were telling me that your wife worked there first while you were still at Camp 5 Store?
- GG: Yes. She was working there for one year by herself, but in the afternoon, I always go and help her. But before I leave the store-- I was working in the Camp 5 Store--I go out in the [Puunene] camp, take order, and then go home, Wailuku, in the evening.
- WN: Why was it that you stayed at the Camp 5 Store for a year?
- GG: Well, at the time, I know that my wife can manage the store because it was not so busy. Because new stores, it takes time to grow, you know. So, I wait for another one year.
- WN: You would work at the Camp 5 Store, and then after the store was pau hana, you would . . .
- GG: Yeah, as soon as I'm through from working Camp 5 Store, I go out in the camp and take order, and bring 'em to Wailuku--the order--and make the order that night. And then, the next day, I go work in the [Camp 5] store--we start 8 o'clock [a.m.]--6:30 or 7 o'clock, I leave my house already, load up my car, and go deliver before I start working in the store.
- WN: Did the Camp 5 Store people know you were doing this?
- GG: Yes, they know because I told them before. So, they told me--especially the boss, "Well, it's good luck for you. You try your business, because you have all the experience here, and you was working in another store [Nagatani Store], before. You get all the experience. It's good for you, and good luck for you," he said--the boss.
- WN: What made you decide to start your own business?
- GG: At that time, I was working in the [Camp 5] plantation store. I know the prices of the wholesale, and I know the percentage of retail. So, I was thinking, if I go make my store and I can sell so much, I know I can make it, because I had been working hard in the plantation store. If I work hard the same way as I do--I will do, I should say--then I know I can make it. That's why, it makes my mind that I try my luck to make my own business.
- WN: At that time, had lot of plantation stores, and then, had lot of Japanese-run stores, yeah? Did you think that you could get your percentage of customers?
- GG: At that time, I know. I could get plenty of them because I told them, "The price that we sell in the [plantation] store will be the

same price I will sell you. You can compare, and if you don't want, well, it's up to you, but I greatly appreciate if you will patronize on me."

So, they tell, "If the same price, no problem. We buy from you."

So, at that time, I have all different nationality. I have Filipinos, I have Japanese, I have Chinese, Hawaiian--all kind of ethnic.

WN: When your wife was in the store, what kind of things did she do in the store?

GG: She got to sell, upkeep the books because I'm not there every time. She had to do all the buying. And I asked my sons to help me to deliver, too, in Wailuku if I'm not there. So, she was doing all those things in the store.

WN: Why did you quit working in the Camp 5 Store?

GG: I cannot handle my job, already, in Wailuku. It's too big, it's growing. So, I have all, everything. The customers is plenty, and I know I can make it, so I decide I'll quit the [Camp 5] store.

WN: So, about how much capital did you need to get started?

GG: (Chuckles) At that time, it was very small. I start only on \$10,000 capital. I bought my icebox, I bought my truck. And then, whatever I get left, I go buy [merchandise from] the company. All the company--the wholesalers--they were willing to help me out. They gave me a good credit. So, I could buy as much as I want. What I can buy from there, I can just all charge. After thirty days, end of the month, I have to pay that one.

WN: From the very beginning when you were starting out, they gave you credit--the wholesalers?

GG: They gave me credit because before I start my business, they have to interview me--what is my experience, what knowledge I know in business. So, I tell all the story, and they said, "Okay. We give you credit." That's how they make on me.

WN: For example, which wholesalers?

GG: It was Maui Dry Goods and A&B [Kahului Store], at that time.

WN: Just those two?

GG: Well, there are some other small wholesalers selling candies, like that. Yeah, at that time.

WN: Do you think that if you didn't have that experience working Camp 5 and all that various stores, you wouldn't have gotten credit right away?

GG: I could not. I cannot start with the \$10,000, because I had to buy my truck, I had to buy ice box, freezer, like that. So, I think that was not enough. But I was so lucky. They wen give me credit right away.

But I told them, "At the present time, well, I thank you very much for giving me credit, but I have to use my [own] money, first. If I don't have the money, then I can charge?"

He tell, "Yes. All right. Sure, any time."

So, I had been using all the balance of my money--the \$10,000.

WN: This \$10,000, this is all from the money that you made working in the Camp 5 Store and other jobs?

GG: Yes. That was all the money I kept with my wife. So, all the things. "If I no go through, I go back plantation, I go cut grass again," I told my wife. So, well, thanks to God, we make it.

WN: Did you have to borrow any money at all?

GG: I did not borrow any money.

WN: Before you started the store--you got married about twelve years before that--was your wife working before that?

GG: No, my wife did not work because she was going school at that time, when I got married.

WN: Did anyone else help you out in starting a business?

GG: From the beginning, nobody. Only myself and my wife. I cannot afford to hire anybody because my business was still small at that time.

WN: What procedure did you go through to get a license?

GG: To go in the license is for the gross income tax, the regular kind for business kind.

WN: Where did you have to go for that?

GG: We have to ask to the tax office for gross income tax license.

WN: Can you tell me what you sold in your store? In the beginning?

GG: From the beginning, I have groceries, I have dry goods, frozen meat, like that, or frozen fish.

WN: Anything else?

GG: Well, from the beginning, that's all, when I was starting.

- WN: As your business grew, what kind of thing did you add in your store?
- GG: When my business was growing, I had to sell again another . . . . Like liquor--beer and wine. So, I have to increase my sales because I know people were demanding liquor at that time--beer and wine.
- WN: Was the liquor license expensive at that time?
- GG: At that time, it's expensive. For only beer and wine, it costs \$200. And then, if everything, with the hard liquor, it cost \$900.
- WN: Per . . . .
- GG: One year, only.
- WN: One year? Hoo. So, about how many years you were in operation before you started selling liquor?
- GG: I start from 1946 . . . . Nineteen fifty [1950], I was selling liquor, already. From that year 1950.
- WN: It seems as though your business grew pretty good within four years, yeah?
- GG: It was growing good, because my sales was really quite good for me and my wife.
- WN: Why do you think it was good? What did you do to have good sales?
- GG: Like me, I was working in the plantation stores, and I am well known in there [Puunene camps], and they trust me. That's why my sales increased, because people knows me, and they trust me, and the service that I give to them is really very good.
- WN: What percentage of your business came from the Puunene side?
- GG: My business was mostly in Puunene. It's about 60 percent in Puunene and 40 percent in Wailuku side.
- WN: Was that unusual for a Wailuku business to do more business in Puunene?
- GG: It depends. Because the reason why is, I was from Puunene and I was well known in there. That's why I get more customers in there than in Wailuku.
- WN: Most of the people you took orders from you knew?
- GG: Yes. All those people that taking orders from me are well known to me, and I know their ability in paying their bill. I don't sell to

[just] anybody. I only sell [to] the person that I know his ability is good in paying.

WN: So, when you started out, you were selling frozen fish, frozen meat, and groceries?

GG: Groceries and dry goods. Dry goods means material, slipper, clothing, like that. Shoes, raincoat, all kind. Those are all under dry goods, yeah?

WN: Did you sell lot of Filipino foods?

GG: Well, at that time, it's not very much because we never had a wholesale store that can supply everything that the Filipino needs. We have only one in Honolulu, and the sales are only limited. So, mostly, I buy Japanese goods, which the Filipino like.

WN: Did you ever try to find a Filipino wholesaler that could supply you?

GG: At that time, we had only one. And then, every month, he is coming down to Maui. He goes to all Japanese stores, and at the same time, he came down to my store, the time I just start. So, that's when I start buying.

WN: What company was this?

GG: That was the Labrador Wholesale Store.

WN: How about things like bagoong? Did you sell bagoong?

GG: Yes. Those bagoong is, most, from the Philippines.

WN: From Labrador?

GG: Yeah, Labrador.

WN: How about the homemade type that the [local] fish markets made?

GG: Yes. Those homemade type, same thing, I sell, but mostly they buy from the one that made from the Philippines from the Labrador Store.

WN: In those days, what was more expensive? The homemade ones or the one you get from Philippines?

GG: The homemade one is more expensive, and the one I bought from Labrador is cheaper. You know, those days, the labor [in the Philippines] was too cheap, so we could get cheaper from import at that time.

WN: What other things did you buy from Labrador?

GG: Like bagoong, slippers, and dried fish, and some others that I don't recall.

WN: Did you sell magazines like Bannawag?

GG: Well, those magazines, I bought it from the V.S. Galang. That was the one that supplying the magazines [to] the entire state. V.S. Galang.

WN: How do you spell that?

GG: V.S. G-A-L-A-N-G.

WN: At that time, when you were opening up your store, what were the other Filipino-run stores around Wailuku and Kahului?

GG: At that time I had, that A.B. Sevilla [another interviewee], Arquero Store, and . . . . Yeah, the grocery stores. Those are only the stores.

WN: How about in Kahului?

GG: In Kahului, there was the Maui Filipino Store.

WN: So, you said that you would take orders and deliver to people that you knew were good customers?

GG: Yeah. I was doing that. From the beginning I start my business, I used to go out and take orders, and then, deliver the next day.

WN: And that would be on credit?

GG: That's all credit. But I was lucky because I had selected all the good customers. And then, end of month, as soon as they get payday, they pay me right there, with no balance.

WN: You mean, they would pay you the whole thing?

GG: They paid me the whole thing.

WN: What percentage of your customers, you think, was Filipino?

GG: About 65 percent on the Filipinos, and then, 35 percent for other nationality.

WN: In talking to some Japanese people who had stores, they would say that lot of the Filipinos would give trouble--I mean, not give trouble, but not pay their debts.

GG: Not paying their bills?

WN: Yeah. I was just wondering how you felt about that. Did you find that to be true or . . .



GG: Well, of course, some. Because like them, the first time they go in the camp, they just sell to anybody, whether it's good or no good. They don't know the ability of that person paying. So, in the end, in so many months, they get problem, already, in collecting. But in comparing to my own self, I did not do that. I only pick up the person that I know. The one who was buying [at] Camp 5 Store, I know him well. I know they pay their bills. Because if they pay their bills good to the place I work before, in the camp plantation store, I know he will be paying the bills to me the same. That's why I did not lose very much in my sales.

WN: You took orders and you delivered. You did that all by yourself?

GG: Yes, I did it.

WN: Was there any time that you hired anybody to do delivering?

GG: At that time, in 1956, I was operated in the kidney, so I had to call my brother, who was also working in a store, before. But he already quit because they sold the business that he was working. It happened he went take vacation to the Philippines. So, I wrote a letter to him that he has to come back right away because on certain month, I going take my operation, and I want him to come and work for me. Well, finally, he came and help me. He was working for me for one year.

WN: So, how long were you out? You know, in the hospital?

GG: I was in the hospital for about seven days, I think. One week.

WN: The people in Puunene, when they had to pay you on payday, how would they do it? Would they come to your store?

GG: Those people whom I sell in the camp, I go in the camp and collect. Those people who I cannot see them in the afternoon, sometimes, they come down to the store and pay their bill.

WN: About how big was your store?

GG: My store, that was about forty-eight feet by forty-five feet.

WN: In the store, you had a refrigerator. What other kind of equipment did you have in there?

GG: I have refrigerator and freezer . . . . Well, that's all I had. Besides that, I have the shelves for put the dry goods, like that-- the material that I bought. And I had also all this kind school supplies. Sell ice cream, you know, all this.

WN: Could people just go there, and take what they wanted, and then pay you? Or did you have to get it for them?

GG: Ah, no. If they come down the store, they just go pick up themselves,

and then bring it to the counter, and then charge. But mostly, on those people that come down the store, if they cannot carry [home] the things that they buy, I have to bring. I was selling rice, chicken feed, besides the groceries and the merchandise. It's too heavy for them, so I have to go deliver.

WN: Did you do any special favors for the customers? You said you delivered sometimes, but anything else?

GG: Sometimes, I do this way. Sometimes, some of the Filipinos going home to the Philippines, and they ask me to bring their trunks down the Kahului Wharf. So, I have to go in the morning and bring 'em to the wharf as special favor for them. And sometimes, those people, they get problems, like that, they want to see the police, they become [United States] citizen, like that, or they want to see lawyer. They consult me, and they want me to go with them. So, I have to go with them. That's a special favor for them.

WN: Why would they go to you for these things?

GG: They don't know how to go about it, so they have to call me up. So, I have to bring them. They don't know where even the office of the lawyer, or where do they go, like that; or some information to the tax office, they don't know where to go. So, I help them out.

WN: And you still doing that kind of things, eh?

GG: Yeah. Especially those people who are ordering their families [from] the Philippines. Hey, it takes lots of time for this.

WN: You mean, bringing them?

GG: Bringing them, go to the lawyer, make all up in a group support, like that--this and that. Those are all the special favor for them, without any pay. I don't charge them anything.

WN: But these are your customers, though?

GG: Those are my customers, yeah.

WN: Part of your business came from taking orders and delivering, yeah? And part of your sales came from drop-in people--people who walked in the store. Which one was more?

GG: Oh, the one I taking order. If I go take order, I get more than those walking down the store.

WN: Plenty more?

GG: Yes. Had plenty.

WN: Would you say, about twice as much?

GG: Well, maybe, about four times than the one that come down the store. Those people who come down the store is when that's their day off, or that's Sunday or Saturday, like that, they come down. But weekdays, they don't come out. I have to go in their houses.

WN: What was your hours? From when to when did you open?

GG: (Chuckles) The hours is long. I start early in the morning. I sell pastries from 5:30 [a.m.] to 8:30 in the evening. When I stay busy, plenty guys come, sometimes it comes to 9 o'clock in the evening.

WN: So, 5:30, you start selling pastries. Did you make the pastries?

GG: No. The bakery deliver that to my store early in the morning-- 5:30, he deliver. So, I know what time he comes; I have to open the store before he comes. Because people, from that time, those who cannot wake up early in the morning, they don't cook anymore. They just come down the store and buy pastries for them.

WN: Did your store have any type of restaurant or anything, where you can sit down?

GG: No. I didn't have that kind.

WN: Okay. When you first started your store, in one day, about how much would you gross?

GG: From the beginning, I think, maybe, I gross about \$200 a day with all the sales that I do in the camp.

WN: As time went on, did it increase or decrease?

GG: Oh, it increased. Because in one month time--around the time I quit--eleven to twelve thousand dollars is my sales every month. So, it increased.

WN: All the way up to 1970 when you retired, it was going up to eleven to twelve thousand in gross?

GG: Yeah, uh huh.

WN: When you started, you started to sell frozen things--frozen meat, frozen fish--and then, you started to sell liquor. What other changes did you make in what goods you carried?

GG: At that time, I did not spend any more because the building was already crowded. So, I did not spend anything, because the feed, and the rice, and the liquor is a big space in the warehouse. So, I could not add any more in my sales. Appliances, like that, I just take the order, and then go buy from the wholesaler, and then deliver. I don't keep 'em in stock.

- WN: When you bought from the wholesaler, did you have to go get it yourself?
- GG: Yeah, I have to go get it, myself. And from there, I had to go straight--deliver to the house.
- WN: When you started in 1946, that was about the time when the union was coming out, and they had a sugar strike not too long after that. How did that affect your business?
- GG: At that time, while they was on strike, it affects me a little bit, because you know why? People, my regular customer, is still buying from me. Although they are not working, they come and buy. And then, at the end of the month, they cannot pay me. I got to hold the bag. So, it was a slowdown. Very slow.
- WN: Did you give them more liberal credit or . . .
- GG: I have to give them credit because they have threaten me if I don't give them the credit, when they go work, they will not buy from me anymore. (Laughs) That was the word they was telling me.
- WN: So, did you go along with it and give them credit?
- GG: Yes, I did. Because I told the company [wholesalers] to help me out. If they can help me out, when they go back to work, then I pay all my bills. And they said, "All right." They was willing. "Just pay what you can. What you cannot, you pay later." The company was very good to me, very nice.
- WN: Oh, you mean, the wholesalers?
- GG: Wholesalers.
- WN: Were you asked by the union to donate anything during the strike?
- GG: At the time, they asked donation. I gave them rice. So, they were really satisfied because a small store like me, I can give one bag rice, they were so happy.
- WN: When you determine your retail price, were you aware of your competitor's prices before you put your own price on?
- GG: That, I don't know, but I had to get my markup. You see, the same thing I was doing in the plantation store, the same procedure I was making my business. I had to take so much percentage. On certain item, [if] we cannot get the right percentage, we have to sell it just above the wholesale price.
- WN: About what percent markup on groceries did you use?
- GG: Mostly on groceries, it depends. Some, we get 12 percent; some, 15

percent; some, 18 percent; some, 20 percent. We could sell those Japanese goods for 20 percent. Those we buy from the Mainland, mostly we sell 'em for 18 percent or 16 percent markup.

WN: How come Japanese goods, you could mark up higher?

GG: It's cheaper. It's cheaper, and we can sell 'em higher.

WN: So, those Japanese things, where did you get that from?

GG: That's from the A&B [Kahului Store], because they have a regular Japanese salesman from Honolulu selling them, too.

WN: Like what stores did they come from?

GG: In Honolulu, let's see, they have that Fuji Shōten. That's the name of the wholesaler. There are many, but I don't recall the names.

WN: Who were your chief competitors at that time?

GG: You mean, among the Filipinos or the other businessmen?

WN: Say, among . . . . Well, to attract the Filipino customers, say.

GG: Well, that, the only way is the plantation store. We have Filipino stores, too, in Kahului, but they were giving the same kind of markup.

WN: What about the Maui Shōkai?

GG: Yeah. His customers is mostly about 75 to 80 percent on Filipinos, too, at that time. The Maui Shōkai.

WN: How were your prices compared to, say, Maui Shōkai.

GG: It depends. Sometimes, mine is higher; sometimes, mine is cheaper. It depends how we buy that merchandise, because we go on the percentage. If I buy little bit higher, I have to sell it little bit higher, too.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: When you were taking orders and delivering, did you follow the new month order procedure?

GG: Yeah, I do. Otherwise, I cannot sell. Because the plantation [stores], they start giving new month on the twenty-fifth of every month.

So, I have to make the same. I had to make the same to compete with them. Otherwise, I cannot get new orders for the next month.

WN: So, was your new month time the same time as the plantation?

GG: Yeah, I do that. Sometimes, I make more early, because some people wants that.

"Eh, tomorrow is new month. You can give it today?"

So, I tell, "If you want it today, I give you today."

WN: You did that for anybody who asked?

GG: Only the good customers that pay their bills--they can pay all. But mostly, about 90 percent, I was doing that, because they were all good customers.

WN: Was it a lot busier during new month time?

GG: It's busier. To go to Puunene in one day, I had to go three times. I load up in the truck, plus the scratch feed alone--that's twenty bags one time, I load up on the truck. Or if I do get plenty chicken feed, scratch feed, triple duty, like that, I put ten bags on that rice, and then the rest on the feed. It depends on the location I go, whether people order so I could deliver that at one time.

WN: Which Puunene camps did you go?

GG: I went to Alabama Camp, Spanish B, Camp 4, McGerrow Camp, and Church Camp.

WN: Did you go to Camp 1, Spreckelsville?

GG: No, I didn't go over there. It's too far for me, already.

WN: Did you do any type of expanding of your store or any type of remodeling over the years?

GG: I did one time, just to extend one room next to the store for a sewing place, where my wife sew. Because she was sewing dresses, before. So, I made an extension. That's an additional on that building.

WN: Was this for her to make dresses to sell in the store?

GG: Yeah. Sell in the store. And the those people who come down there, they want to make dress. So, my wife, from that time, if not more customers, she can be sewing. Then, when somebody come, then she can just stand up and serve the customer.



- WN: So, your wife did sewing, and what else did she do?
- GG: Help take care of the store, inside of the store. Saleslady in there. That's a clerk, I should say.
- WN: Not too long after you opened your store, some of the camps started to close down, and people started to move into Dream City?
- GG: At that time, people was moving . . . . In the Dream City were only very few, yet, at that time. But when I closed my store in 1970, then that's [when] the people starting to buy properties in Kahului and come down over here, live in Kahului.
- WN: So, when Kahului Shopping Center was built, did that affect your business at all?
- GG: Well, from the beginning, it did not affect me because people was having once a month payday. So, they had to charge, take credit to the stores, because they had no money to buy [with] cash. Because Kahului Shopping Center is all cash. So, they had to buy from me because they don't have the money, already.
- WN: All the way up until you closed your store in 1970, you still gave credit?
- GG: Yes, I still gave credit, uh huh.
- WN: Did you ever think about converting to all cash and carry?
- GG: I did not think that way, because if I convert 'em to cash and carry, I know I cannot [make a] go. Because people, they used to to charge--their credit, I should say--and then that's their habit, already. If I don't credit them, they will feel sorry, and then they will not buy from me.
- WN: Even when your customers from Puunene started to move to Dream City, say, did they still come to your store?
- GG: Yes. They come to my store, or I go to their house.
- WN: You mean, their new house?
- GG: The new house, yes. So, still they are my customer. They come from there, all different places in Puunene, as long as they was buying from me, they always come to me. And then, if they need anything, they just call me up, and I go deliver. So, I did not lose them.
- WN: In 1970, you closed the store, yeah? Why did you close?
- GG: For my retirement. Because I take my early retirement. So, I have to close my store because I was really so tired in carrying the



100-pound rice, 100-pound feed. Was too much for me, and my age, so I had changed my mind to retire earlier.

WN: Was business not going good? Was it going down?

GG: No, it was very good, yet. At that time, it was very good, yet. Because at that time in 1970, the only stores that opened was . . . . I forget the stores, that shopping center, now, because this . . . .

WN: Oh, Maui Mall?

GG: Maui Mall is not very long [built in 1970]. Kaahumanu [Center] is not very long [built in 1973]. Kahului Shopping Center is not very long [built in 1951]. After that, 1970. Oh, that Maui Supermarket in Wailuku.

WN: Ooka?

GG: No, that's the Maui Supermarket, that's not Ooka. Ooka was later.

WN: So, this Maui Supermarket, what?

GG: Well, he was selling good, and I feel that if I going stay too long in the business, maybe I going lose some of my customers because he was selling cheap.

WN: What about your Kahului customers? They would go to Maui Supermarket?

GG: Not all of them, because at that time, not everybody get cars. Very few guys get car. So, they have no way to go. They have to order from me because I go deliver in their houses.

WN: So, after a while, they started to just call you up?

GG: Not all the time, they call me up. I have to check them up. Go to the house and say hello, [see] what they need. So, they just tell me what they want.

WN: All the way up until 1970, you were doing that?

GG: Yeah. Uh huh.

WN: Did you ever want your sons or daughters to continue the store?

GG: Well, I tried to convince them that one of them should carry over, but they said the hours they putting in there, it's too long, and they did not want the hours, it's too long. So, they want to work only eight hours, and go home, and that's all.

(Laughter)

GG: That's why. So, I did not force them to take over the store because

they were having good job and work eight hours a day.

I was telling my wife, "Ah, well, we have to make a decision. We have to sell the store, or you carry over under your name."

So, my wife told me, "Well, I cannot. If you stop working already, I have to stop, too. I like take a rest."

So, we decided, if that's the case, might as well we sell.

She tell me, "Okay. We go sell."

WN: Who did you sell it to?

GG: To a Japanese businessman.

WN: As you look back today, you have everybody living in Kahului, no camps anymore, you have all these modern cash-and-carry supermarkets, what are you're feelings toward what's . . .

GG: They're giving pay to the working people twice a month now, this is good. Because they have discount prices, now. Although it's higher, they are competing with prices. Like the other supermarket, he giving special. The next day or the other day, the other supermarket going give special. Now, it looks good.

WN: But, nowadays, you don't have things like taking orders and delivering, yeah?

GG: At this time, there is nobody taking order, no. Everybody goes to the supermarket because--as I said--twice, they get paid one month, and they get the money.

WN: Well, I guess that's it, then. Thank you very much.

GG: You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 7-59-3-80

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

George Guerrero (GG)

March 6, 1980

Kahului, Maui

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. George Guerrero. Today is March 6, 1980, and we're at his home in Kahului, Maui.

There's a few more questions that I'd like to ask you. You said earlier that without your Camp 5 Store experience, it would have been hard for you to have your own business. What do you mean by that?

GG: While I was working at the plantation store, I know I can make it. With all those good customers that want to support me, I know I can [make a] go. If not [for] my experience in the plantation store, it might be I never had my store. So, with that experience, that encouraged me to make my own business because, at that time I was working in the plantation store, I was also a truck driver, taking orders from the wholesale department and bring 'em to the stores. That's everyday job, now, I go. So, I check up all the prices. The prices was good--the retail prices in there. So, I was thinking to myself, if I make my own business, I know I can make it with the percentage that they have in this price. So, that encouraged me to make my own business.

WN: In other words, you knew the costs of the items?

GG: Yes. At that time, I know the cost because it shows in the bill--the prices, the cost of the case, and the retail for one can, they have already put in the bill. That's why, I know I can make it.

WN: You knew the cost code? Is that it?

GG: Yes. They teach me on the code. So, that, not anybody knows that one. Everybody [store] get their own code, yeah? But like us, only four of us that working in the store knows about the code.

WN: So, after you left the store, you knew how much the plantation was making on each item?

GG: Yes. I know. I know everything because they put all prices--the

retail price--in the bills when I go take the order from the wholesale department.

WN: What other things did you learn from that plantation store experience that helped you in your business?

GG: The main thing is how to handle the customers. That's why, if you are good to the customers, and then they like you, they going buy from you and they patronize you. So, that's all the system I was doing.

WN: Like you said, you chose the good customers, yeah? If you were to go in a camp, how would you choose which are the good ones? How did you know?

GG: With my experience in the plantation stores, I know who the good customers and I know the bad customers [who] don't pay their bills every day. So, when I open my business, I know to whom I could sell.

Before I made my business, I tell all those good customers, "If I make my business, you think you can help me out? You can buy from me?"

They reply, "Do you give the same price with the plantation store?"

"Sure I do. I work over here. You know the price. It's the same price I going give you when I make my store," I told them.

So, I did it. That's why, I get plenty customers. I was not worrying about customers.

WN: For example, if four Filipino single men were living in one house, and you knew, maybe, three of them weren't good customer, but one was a good customer, what did you do?

GG: Well, the way I made that one is, I just take order on the good customer's one. The rest, I will not ask them if they want to buy or not because I know their reputation already that they are not good customers. They don't pay their bill good. That's how I do. Every house I go, three, four guys live in the house, two guys good, I only sell the good one. That's how I make my business go.

WN: What if one of them asks you, "Oh, can I buy?"

GG: If someone would ask me like that, I just take the order.

When I go deliver, [they ask], "Where is my order?"

"You know, I run short with that goods, and I don't have, now. When it comes, I going let you know if you still like buy. But now, I just get enough for the regular customers."

So, he would not feel hurt, you know.

WN: And you wouldn't deliver to him?

GG: No, I won't deliver to him.

WN: Anything else that you learned from plantation store?

GG: It's not only on the plantation store. The plantation store wen send us to school for three month's training school. We had [at] that Wailuku Hotel, they send us. That's where I learned plenty how to get along with the customers. You know, your attitude. You have to act good.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: If you didn't have this plantation store experience, do you think your business would have survived?

GG: If I did not go work in the plantation store, I know that I could not open my business, because I know I cannot make it. To open a business, you have [to have] a good experience and know the people whom you are selling. So that, in return, you will get your money back. With all that experience I get in the store, that encouraged me to make my business.

WN: Who encouraged you to get into the business?

GG: Nobody encouraged me, but the experience I get, I learned from the plantation store, that encouraged me to go to business.

WN: Okay. Thank you very much.

GG: Okay, [you are] welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

**STORES and  
STOREKEEPERS of  
Paia & Puunene, Maui**

**Volume I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Ethnic Studies Program  
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

**June 1980**